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STATE OF MONTANA

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**Governor Steve Bullock Signs Bill Expanding Unemployment Insurance
Benefits for Victims of Domestic Violence**

Helena, MT – Today at the Friendship Center in Helena, Governor Steve Bullock was joined by Rep. Jenny Eck as he hosted a ceremonial signing of HB 306, to expand unemployment insurance benefits to Montanans forced to leave their jobs because of domestic violence. Currently, these individuals are only eligible for 10 weeks of unemployment benefits. With this bill becoming law, they will now be eligible for the full 28 weeks of benefits.

“No Montanan should be forced to choose between the physical safety of themselves and their children, and their economic security,” Bullock said of the measure. “This law will be an important step towards promoting workplace equity, and it will provide victims of domestic violence an avenue to leave their job and seek new employment where they and their families can be safe.”

This law will promote economic well-being of victims of domestic violence and their families by allowing them to leave their job to keep them and their families safe. On average, U.S. women lose nearly 8 million days of paid work each year because of violence perpetrated against them by current or former husbands, cohabitants, dates, and boyfriends, resulting in not only lost economic productivity for themselves and their employers.

“I’m proud that after many years of work and debate, Montana is finally providing equity in unemployment benefits for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault,” said Eck. “There are many societal and economic impacts from these crimes. This law will provide Montanans a critical pathway out of these dangerous situations.

Forty states provide unemployment insurance benefits for victims of domestic violence. Of these, Montana was the only state that reduced benefits to these individuals to fewer than the standard limit of 28 weeks. With this limitation removed, victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are more empowered to leave an unsafe situation, relocate, and find reemployment free from their perpetrator. This increase in benefits will not result in increased costs for employers.

“We are honored to host the signing of this important piece of legislation,” said Abbie Chermack, Outreach and Education Coordinator at the Friendship Center. “At the Friendship Center, we not only

provide safe haven for victims of domestic violence, we also work to help support their recovery physically, emotionally, and economically. This law will provide our clients with additional economic security to ensure they aren't forced to stay in an abusive situation simply because they can't afford to leave."

Intimate partner violence is a leading cause of workplace fatalities for women. Nearly 33 percent of women killed in U.S. workplaces between 2003-2008 were killed by a current or former intimate partner. Women are more likely than men to be victims of on-the-job intimate partner homicide.

This measure was a part of Bullock's Equal Pay for Equal Work efforts to close the gender pay gap in Montana and promote workplace equity. He established a taskforce in 2013 to identify the causes of and develop solutions to the gender pay gap in Montana. Since that time, Bullock has instituted wage negotiation training at each of Montana's Job Service offices, as well as conducting a top-to-bottom pay audit of Montana state government to identify gender pay disparities in the state.

Bullock has long worked to expand protections for victims of domestic violence. While serving as Attorney General, Bullock expanded the Hope Card Service statewide. This service allows anyone with a valid, permanent order of protection to request a card that summarizes the order's most important details. This wallet sized card allows the bearer to easily prove their order of protection in another jurisdiction, and allows law enforcement to take action in the event of a violation of the order.

The Friendship Center is the only shelter in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater, Meagher, and Powell Counties that provides a safe haven and a broad range of support services at no charge for anyone who has suffered domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Photos: [1](#), [2](#)

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